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ABSTRACT

This report is a synthesis of the Midterm Review of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), a systematic effort to determine how recommendations made at CONFINTEA V in 1997 have been implemented and its commitments met by examining activities carried out worldwide in the field of adult education and learning since 1997. The introduction states that a series of thematic workshops addressed such adult education contexts and approaches as democracy, poverty, literacy, work, gender, health and environment, higher education institutions, teacher training, and museums, libraries and cultural heritage; five sessions were held on regional views; and four working groups highlighting major issues were devoted to the following: (1) rethinking of and advocacy for adult learning in the light of international agendas; (2) policy: structuring, finance, partnerships; (3) monitoring adult education; and (4) increasing participation in adult learning. An analysis of adult education and learning since 1997 includes findings in the following areas: (1) understanding adult learning; (2) making policies for adult learning; (3) structuring adult learning; (4) adult learning for what?; (5) participating in adult learning; (6) enhancing the quality of adult learning; (7) cultivating partnerships in adult learning; and (8) investing in adult learning. The document also contains sections concerning challenges to adult education and learning and a call for action and accountability. (MO)

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ED 482 534

Recommitting to Adult Education and Learning

Synthesis Report of the CONFINTEA V Midterm Review Meeting

September 6 – 11, 2003
Bangkok, Thailand

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Page

2 Preface

3 Introduction

5 The New World of Adult Education and Learning

9 Adult Education and Learning since 1997
- Understanding Adult Learning
- Making Policies for Adult Learning
- Structuring Adult Learning
- Adult Learning – For What?
- Participating in Adult Learning
- Enhancing the Quality of Adult Learning
- Cultivating Partnerships in Adult Learning
- Investing in Adult Learning

16 Challenges to Adult Education and Learning

18 A Call for Action and Accountability

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Preface

The Midterm Review of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) brought together over three hundred representatives of Member States, including ministers and senior-level officials, and agencies of the United Nations system as well as non-governmental and civil-society organizations and academic and research institutions from more than ninety countries in Bangkok, Thailand, from September 6 to 11, 2003.

Organized by the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE) in collaboration with the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education and with support from the Department of Non-formal Education of the Ministry of Education of Thailand, the Review was aimed at tracking goals accomplished and difficulties encountered over the past six years in executing the CONFINTEA V agenda. Through a series of thematic workshops, regional reviews and plenary sessions, it examined recent trends and new developments in practices and policies of adult learning and education.

In looking forward to the CONFINTEA VI Conference in 2009, the Review was designed to propose strategies for the advancement of adult learning to be followed in future programs. It also sought to ally more closely the CONFINTEA V agenda with the Dakar Framework for Action and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

As a synthesis of the Review proceedings, this Report outlines the major issues and key recommendations which emerged during the six-day meeting. The participants were unanimous in calling for renewed commitment, sharing of national and international resources and creative partnerships in adult learning. We hope that UNESCO and all stakeholders in adult education will take our Call for Action and Accountability to heart in affirming the joy of adult learning.

Justin Ellis
Chairperson of the Governing Board
UNESCO Institute for Education

Introduction

The Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), held in 1997, looked ahead to the world's transition to the new millennium by identifying adult learning as a key to the twenty-first century. The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning adopted there forcefully expresses the vital significance of adult education and learning by identifying its potential "for fostering ecologically sustainable development, for promoting democracy, justice, gender equity, and scientific, social and economic development, and for building a world in which violent conflict is replaced by dialogue and a culture of peace based on justice". These are goals reflecting the fundamental role of education in instilling respect for human rights and basic freedoms, in supporting progress in the diverse spheres and dimensions of human life and in encouraging care for the natural world in which we live.

Events which have occurred around the globe in the past six years: matters of profound social, political and economic consequence, many of them exciting, others profoundly disturbing, commonly confirm, if nothing else, that adult education and learning represents one of the greatest promises of our time – a promise which must be kept.

The Midterm Review Meeting, attended by over three hundred participants from more than ninety countries, composed a systematic effort to determine how recommendations made at CONFINTEA V have been implemented and its commitments met, examining activities carried out worldwide in the field of adult education and learning since 1997.

A series of thematic workshops addressed the basic contexts of and manifold approaches to adult education and learning, including: Democracy; Poverty; Literacy; Work; Gender; Health and the Environment; Higher Education Institutions; Documentation and Information Networking (ALADIN); Teacher Training and the Quality of Adult-learning Programs; Monitoring and Evaluation;

Museums, Libraries and Cultural Heritage; Information and Communication Technologies; Persons with Disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, Refugees and Migrants, and Prisoners; and, finally, International Co-operation and Solidarity.

Five sessions were held on regional reviews (Africa, the Arab States, Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean) conducted by UNESCO Regional Bureaus and other regional partners as well as networks of the UNESCO Non-governmental Organization Collective Consultation on Education For All. A synthesis of fifty country reviews submitted by the National Commissions of Member States following a common grid was presented along with the findings of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) resulting from assessment studies carried out in sixteen countries.

In highlighting major issues in adult education and learning, four working groups were devoted to: Rethinking of and Advocacy for Adult Learning in the Light of International Agendas; Policy: Structuring, Finance, Partnerships; Monitoring Adult Education; and Increasing Participation in Adult Learning. In a concluding round-table discussion, representatives of the United Nations Fund for Population Activity, the European Union, the German Ministry of Education and Research, the World Bank and a former Latin American Minister of Education spoke to the foremost challenges facing adult education and learning in today's rapidly changing world.

The final session focused on the discussion of the draft report of the Review and the Call for Action and Accountability. Numerous contributions made by the participants have helped sharpen many of the formulations found in this Report.

The New World of Adult Education and Learning

CONFINTEA V acknowledged that economic, political and social imperatives related to profound structural transformations occurring around the globe have been driving the new concern for lifelong learning. But the goals set and commitments made in The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future have not been fully implemented and accounted for. Compelling changes engendered by the forces of globalization and technology coupled with already existing development problems and far-reaching demographic factors, moreover, are fast creating new conditions of inequity and violence to which adult learning must urgently respond. These conditions especially influence issues of poverty, literacy, democracy, gender and health and the environment.

Poverty remains both a barrier to learning and a consequence of insufficient education. An estimated 1.2 billion people – one in five of the world's population, two-thirds of these being women – live in abject poverty, wanting adequate food, clean water, sanitation, health-care and education. One-third of all humanity survives on less than US-$ 1 a day. The dominant market forces shaping economic development practices have led to unacceptable levels of poverty severely affecting women and children in particular.

Seventy percent of the world's poor are female; in the least developed countries, fewer than four out of ten women can read or write, compared with six out of ten men. Although in areas stricken with poverty women produce most of the foodstuffs, they still have only a limited voice in community decision-making.

Along with the needs of the urban poor and underprivileged, those of rural communities likewise have received insufficient attention. Indigenous populations suffering from low levels of literacy and life expectancy are especially subject to human-rights abuses as they struggle to maintain a hold on their cultural identities, land and resources.

Migration across borders, whether voluntary due to economic reasons or forced by conflict or war, is growing. The lives of many political and economic migrants and refugees are infracted by poverty, ill health, illiteracy, disability, gender inequity, xenophobia, racial profiling and social exclusion.

Ten per cent of the world's population are persons with disabilities. Yet less than ten per cent of children and youth with disabilities have access to some form of education, while the majority of adults with disabilities have not received any education at all. Poverty is both a cause and consequence of disability, with fifty percent of disability problems linked to poverty.

Unless there is greater direct action, it is likely that twenty-eight countries will not meet any of their United Nations Millennium Development goals by 2015. Confining basic education to primary education will not suffice for helping the majority of the world's poor overcome their poverty.

From a political perspective, there is evidence of widespread erosion of democratic processes attended by declining respect for human rights – whether in the name of national development or international security. Nonetheless, a number of nations have reported growing efforts to promote a rights-based approach to learning. They refer to measures taken for encouraging democratic practices and for locally producing and employing learning materials enabling learners to carry out their own analysis of the world. Learning programs have been designed which aim at challenging dominant development models, at redefining power relationships in both the public and private sphere and at facilitating recognition and encouraging the use of existing local knowledge.

Meanwhile, the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS threatens to eradicate gains made over the last decade along with advancements in health and nutrition in decreasing mortality rates and increasing life expectancy. The educational dimensions of other causes of death and devastation such as malaria, multiple drug-resistant tuberculosis and dysentery also remain inadequately addressed.

Paralleling the worldwide deterioration in health conditions is the continued depletion and destruction of natural resources – from pollution and global warming to desertification and water insecurity.

The situation is urgent in all regions of the globe. Nearly seventy percent of the world's illiterate, of which almost two-thirds are women, are found in Asia. Millions of children drop out of primary school each year for poverty-related reasons, while many of those who remain and complete primary school can barely read and write. Yet the recent United Nations Development Program Human Development Report (2002) shows that Asia has taken steps towards universalizing literacy and providing access to basic education, both for youth and adults. This can be partially attributed to the abundance of regional, national and local educational mechanisms and structures, whether provided by government agencies or non-governmental organizations, business groups, academic and professional organizations or religious societies. Since the late 1980s, there has been increased civil-society involvement in adult learning, especially at the local level.

In most African countries, young people represent up to forty-five percent of the national population, but the learning needs of the majority of them are scarcely being met. The majority of those affected are girls and women, although the gender gap has been reduced in most Eastern and Southern African countries. African governments are often so preoccupied with the immediate weight of debt and present political problems that they fail to realize potential solutions to both lying already at hand in the drastic reduction of the numbers of the unschooled and unskilled. On the other hand, the formation of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) has stimulated a multitude of activities in the areas of formal and non-formal education and female participation in education as well as in the original composition of books and learning materials. The need to create literate environments in multilingual and multicultural settings has been addressed by a series of initiatives on language policies and the use of the mother tongue in literacy training, further in the creation of the African Academy of Languages. Finally, the launching of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as the key development framework for the region augurs well for the fundamental role of education in the region's future.

In the Arab States, security, poverty, deteriorating economic conditions, economic sanctions, the destruction of educational infrastructures and difficulties in post-conflict recovery in countries such as Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine are reversing progress made in literacy and adult education. Of a total population of 280 million, about 70 million citizens of these states are illiterate adults, while 10 million school-age children are not enrolled in schools. Despite these difficulties, there has been enlarged interest in all aspects of adult education, reinforcement of the relation between formal and non-formal education and strengthening of the commitment to the universal 'right to education'. A major new development consists in the establishment of the Arab Network for Literacy and Adult Education, directed towards promoting new associations at the grassroots level and interconnecting education activities at all levels.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, literacy has recently been reinvigorated in many countries. New national coalitions and institutions have been formed specifically to administer to youth and adult education. Co-operation in vocational education has begun in some countries. Progress made in constructing adult-education theories in the region has led to a redefinition of the basic learning needs of youth and adults, including conflict resolution, education for peace, citizenship and cultural identity; also involved are the appreciation of cultural patrimony as well as health issues, human rights and interculturalism – not only

for indigenous peoples, but for the entire population. Nonetheless, there are still 39 million illiterates, eleven percent of the population fifteen years and older. To this figure must be added 110 million young persons and adults who, not having completed their primary education, could qualify as functional illiterates. In this region, twenty percent of children do not finish primary education. Although relatively advanced, since almost universal access is available, the educational system in Latin America faces a significant problem of quality.

In many parts of Europe and North America, where basic education does not pose a problem for large numbers of the population, there is a pronounced need to examine and address the unmet needs of special groups (e.g., Romas/Gypsies, migrants, asylum seekers). While there have been accomplishments in policy development for capacity-building of structures, support mechanisms, partnerships and financing for increasing the quantity and quality of adult learning within a lifelong, life-wide and life-connected framework, there is a distinct unevenness in achievements. There has been greater coherence at the conceptual level, following the shift in emphasis from adult education to adult learning within the overall scheme of lifelong learning – this under the influence of supranational agencies such as UNESCO, the OECD and especially the EU. At the practical level, however, there remains abundant diversity in interpretation.

Finally, trends in education funding around the world indicate that as a percentage of gross national product, public investment in education has stagnated or declined across all developing regions. Market control over education, its vocationalization and continued disparity in access to quality education are the hallmarks of the current situation. The growing privatization of public goods and services has brought with it a previously unknown marketization of education, especially higher education. A dichotomy persists in the provision of education: high quality education is, indeed, available, but at a price which the vast majority of people (especially the rural poor, minority communities, indigenous peoples and other socially and economically disenfranchised groups) cannot afford, so that they have to rely upon options of poor quality and doubtful relevance.

All of these conditions shaping the complex and difficult contemporary world of adult education and learning underscore why action and accountability are now obligatory.

Adult Education and Learning since 1997

Understanding Adult Learning

Despite the conceptual shift from adult education to adult learning disseminated at CONFINTEA V, the latter is unevenly understood and cultivated among different regions and stakeholders. In many countries, adult learning is considered equivalent to acquiring literacy skills. In others, it is confined to vocational education. Learning as the key principle underlying development processes, whether in the areas of active citizenship, health or environment, still needs to be recognized and incorporated in theory and practice.

Yet despite this shift to adult learning, adult education, inasmuch as it pertains to policies, structures and resources, remains an important point of theoretical and practical reference. There is growing interest in relating adult education and/or education in general to the concept of lifelong learning as a policy issue and an operational frame of reference. At the same time, because of the unevenness in the understanding of adult learning, ambiguity persists about its relation to lifelong learning. Although adult learning is part and parcel of lifelong learning, in some instances lifelong learning is wrongly reduced to adult learning.

While UNESCO has played a key role in promoting an understanding of the process of learning as the essential element of development, major international agreements adopted at the start of the twenty-first century like the DAKAR Framework for Action and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals nevertheless remain weak in their advocacy of adult learning.

Making Policies for Adult Learning

The lack of a shared understanding of adult learning coupled with diverse social, political and economic contexts has led to a policy-discourse divide running particularly along the lines between industrialized and developing countries. The former are largely preoccupied with the operationalization of lifelong learning in perfecting the so-called 'knowledge society'. Among the highest priorities are the use of information and communication technologies and the training of the labor force. Developing countries, meanwhile, tend to focus on basic education for all, especially literacy. Very few of these countries ground their educational priorities in the lifelong-learning paradigm. The broad scope of adult learning is, then, reflected in the policies of only a very few countries.

Although adult learning occupies a wide range of sectors from agriculture and labor to health and the environment, there continues to be little recognition of the way learning substantially contributes to attaining their objectives. Once again, the principal role of adult learning in development remains to be acknowledged in national policies and international agendas.

Structuring Adult Learning

The organization of adult learning in many countries is a task for the government as well as non-governmental organizations and private agencies. While the government is primarily responsible for providing adult education, many non-governmental organizations and employers support continuing learning.

A number of countries situate their offices of adult education in the Ministry of Education, while others do not entrust any agency at all with such responsibility. Among the former, relating adult learning to other sectors and integrating its concerns with theirs remain challenges. Among the latter, the diffusion of responsibility for adult learning needs to be counteracted by conscious efforts to bring together all sectors involved in adult education.

In some countries, there is a perceptible movement away from mere basic literacy towards a more integrated view, one connecting adult, non-formal, informal and lifelong-learning opportunities with the Education for All goals. Many are becoming more conscious of gaps in literacy and are beginning to focus more closely on unreached segments of their population.

Meanwhile, a large part of adult-education work takes place outside the purview of those government agencies directly responsible for education. Community-health programs, early childhood-care training, environmental-education courses and skill-training, for instance, are often run by a variety of government agencies (e.g., ministries for women and children, ministries of agriculture, ministries of health). Yet there are no procedures for tracking these programs in unified fashion, nor are there any means for their being readily informed by other adult-education practices.

Decentralization is another trend reflecting the desire of various national authorities to contextualize adult education, and that for two reasons: to increase the relevance of learning in view of local needs and to lessen central administrative burdens. Common among developing countries, however, is that policies of decentralization are hampered by enduring centralized decision-making. In addition, regional, provincial or local structures suffer due to inadequate resources (financial and human) provided by central authorities. An encouraging phenomenon appears, on the other hand, in the participation of non-governmental and civil-society organizations in activities at various levels in a number of countries in which distinct mechanisms for partnerships between the government and such agencies are already in place.

A crucial issue concerns the growing demand on the part of adult learners for the formal recognition of their prior learning, particularly where economic opportunities are at stake. The drive for the accreditation of

prior learning in both industrialized and developing countries aims at overcoming the dichotomy between competencies acquired through the formal system and those acquired outside it. National qualification frameworks developed in a few countries aim to address this demand.

Adult Learning – For What?

Governments and non-governmental organizations have different priorities for adult learning. Five areas which have been identified are: a) democracy and active citizenship, b) literacy and adult basic education, c) decent work environment, d) media and information and communication technologies, finally, e) the needs of special groups. Among learning groups, women have taken center stage, the emphasis being on their learning for gaining control of their lives. Side-by-side with this focus is a burgeoning interest in promoting gender perspectives.

Reasons for advancing adult learning in the first area range from responding to growing anti-democratic movements throughout the world and dealing with mounting hostility against foreigners to issues of consumer rights and environmental matters. Other reasons include building the capacity of the judicial sector to deliver legal services, strengthening civil society, aiding decentralization in transitional countries and promoting active participation in new democratic regimes. Democracy and active citizenship require new skills and competencies along with capacities for institution-building. Participatory programs empowering rural communities have been invaluable in cementing human rights, raising gender awareness and enhancing the income-generating skills needed to fight poverty. The same holds for conflict resolution and efforts aimed at constructing a culture of peace. In several post-war countries, where the social fabric has been rent by war, participatory approaches to adult learning are being used successfully to encourage peace as well as raise the consciousness of learners through civic education of their rights and responsibilities.

Basic literacy for all remains a high priority as a foundation of learning. In a few countries with over eighty-five percent illiteracy, governments are making significant attempts to come to terms with the problem. In some developing countries, adult basic education is viewed as a major component of the effort to enable every citizen to gain access to lifelong learning. Often literacy projects are integrated into strategies for poverty reduction aiming at improving living conditions. Significant innovations have to do with interlinking literacy with care for the environment, health matters, human rights, income-generation, empowering women and enhancing the overall quality of education.

The use of information and communication technologies has expanded in the context of educational,

documentation and information services employed by grassroots movements and village associations, even as market forces are exploiting them to transform education into a commodity. These same technologies have been put to work as tools for self-expression providing new opportunities for creative expression. They have also facilitated the free exchange of information, ideas and products through innovations such as open-source software, peer-to-peer sharing and even e-mail, contributing to an affirmative culture of knowledge-sharing and interactive learning.

The learning needs of special groups have been addressed in several ways. In Europe, adult-learning initiatives for these groups have been primarily directed at the unemployed. Support has been given to immigrants, ethnic minorities and other marginal groups, refugees forming an important reference group in adult education in industrialized countries. Several countries report special programs for indigenous populations. Adult learning for prisoners and handicapped persons has been given scrupulous attention, however, in only a few countries.

While many governments and non-governmental organizations report activities in these five areas, there has been no systematic effort to determine their efficacy or the extent to which they have met their stated objectives. What learners have actually achieved in these areas still needs to be established.

Participating in Adult Learning

Due to the inherent breadth of adult learning, ascertaining the number of women and men who actively participate in it is difficult. Very few countries can provide reliable statistical data on participants in adult-education programs since 1997. The dearth of such data means that observations about adult education frequently involve estimates based mainly on the supply of educational services.

Such estimates reveal that participation rates vary among diverse population groups and even in different parts of the same country. In the Nordic and Caribbean countries, it seems that more women take advantage of learning opportunities. In other areas, men outnumber women. A positive trend, reported by many governments, lies in the unprecedented expansion of learning opportunities for girls and women and the increasing numbers of those who have taken advantage of such opportunities.

Rates in the level of participation in adult education have been reported by nearly all countries in terms of quantity, with almost no reference to quality. Yet there were, in the vast majority of the reports, no statistical data provided to justify even claims made for quantitative increase. This represents a serious methodological gap, one making it difficult for the observer to assess the value of what has been offered to participants or the

extent to which participants have benefited from programs.

Three developments which have contributed to an increase in participation in adult learning are the educational activities of social movements and non-governmental organizations, the International Adult Learners Week and the establishment of community-learning centers.

Enhancing the Quality of Adult Learning

Documentation and research are vital for ensuring the quality of adult learning. But the evidence reveals a chronic lack of systematic documentation (both quantitative and qualitative) of adult-learning experiences and very little indication of how research findings influence policy and practice. While many countries have research institutes for adult education (whether situated in the government itself, universities or the private sector), it is clear that such research remains under-funded in comparison to other education branches. Furthermore, there is limited use of research findings for improving adult education. Consequently, it is no surprise that only a few countries mention the impact of research findings on policies and practices of adult education.

The lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of adult learning reflects a clear need for a more coherent approach. Most countries make no reference at all to the evaluation of adult education apart from cases where donors have demanded it. The development of indicators and identification of benchmarks remain desiderata. Yet there is a burgeoning desire to monitor and evaluate education programs in order to learn lessons which can be applied to future plans and policies. UNESCO, through its Education for All Observatory, is currently working on the creation of indicators for monitoring progress towards the six Education for All goals. There already exists a set of eighteen indicators allowing for reports on the achievement of universal primary education, elimination of gender disparities, progress towards fifty-percent improvement in adult literacy as well as quality in primary education. Together with UNESCO, other supra-national agencies such as the OECD, the EU and the World Bank are propelling the creation of benchmarks and indicators within an overall framework of monitoring and evaluation for enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in education.

Achieving high quality in adult-learning programs depends in large measure on the availability of knowledgeable, skillful, sensitive and socially committed adult educators. Yet priority has not been given to their training. In addition, there is the issue of the character of many programs offered, conceived, as they all too

often are, narrowly, in instrumental terms and for a limited clientele. There is a lack of comprehensive information on adult educators themselves in most countries: on their types, identity and profiles, numbers, working and living conditions, training needs and kinds of training available to them, and other basic data.

The global potential of information and communication technologies for improving the quality of adult learning continues to be hindered by the lack of requisite infrastructures. The hope expressed by many countries is that such technologies will play an important role in adult education by expanding access, reducing costs, improving quality and putting learners in control of their own learning. The trend is uneven, however, between industrialized and developing countries. The former have to a large extent succeeded in integrating such technologies into their education systems, including adult education. In case of the latter, some countries are more advanced than others in applying information and communication technologies. Yet inasmuch as no relevant policy decision appears to have been made by any developing country concerning these technologies, no substantial resources seem to have been allocated for their application in adult education. The obvious reasons cited by many countries have to do with the lack of financial resources and the shortage of trained personnel.

Many countries are creating opportunities for continuing education and enriching the literate environment of adults through the use of mass media, libraries and community-learning centers.

Cultivating Partnerships in Adult Learning

A critical element in promoting adult learning is partnership between governments, non-governmental and civil-society organizations and the private sector. While governments have a major role to play in providing adult education, there are signs of increasing responsibility taken by social partners. This illustrates a shift in the role of governments, which for practical reasons may not be able to respond to all demands for learning, especially in countries where knowledge is expanding at a rapid rate and the labor market is dictating the pace of change in workers' qualifications. There is also a difference between partnerships in the developing countries, in which social partners – particularly non-governmental organizations – are rarely involved in policy-making, and those in most industrialized countries, in which social partners have more political influence.

Reports submitted by countries on international co-operation confirm the continued existence of the familiar one-way pattern of co-operation in the form of financial contributions or technical assistance given by countries, international or regional organizations, or non-governmental organizations of the North to countries of the South. Quite a number of these contributions and forms of assistance, especially those given by bilateral donors, are short-term ventures which have had little lasting effect on adult education. Just as very few countries report long-term co-operative programs, South-South co-operation is also rarely mentioned.

Investing in Adult Learning

Adult education has historically suffered almost everywhere from inadequate financing. The situation today is not much different, with the exception of a very few countries. This is compounded by the fact that only a small number are able to report accurately on investments made in adult learning. Both the sources and patterns of financing adult education are so diverse that it is almost impossible to paint an accurate picture of them.

Another difficulty is that adult learners in some countries participate in diverse activities supported by different institutions which fail to keep separate records for adult learners. It is important to bear in mind that the financial aspect of adult education involves a variety of items shared by other educational services. Some of these expenditures include, in addition to teacher salaries, books and study materials, equipment, furniture, buildings, maintenance etc. A substantial part of costs in all countries is absorbed by volunteers contributing their time and effort.

Two patterns of financing emerge from the analysis of all reports. The first, cutting across all countries, relates to the involvement of state authorities (whether central or local) in collaboration with the private sector. The second concerns national and international co-operation. At the national level, non-governmental and civil-society organizations play an important role in mobilizing funding for adult education and in sponsoring adult education programs.

Challenges to Adult Education and Learning

CONFINTEA V codified a paradigm shift from adult education to adult learning. This shift has, on one hand, positive implications in terms of encouraging a wider, more holistic appreciation of education – one transcending the merely formal sector, unfolding as a lifelong process, responsive to the different needs and varying contexts of learners themselves. On the other hand, it threatens to transfer, especially in a globalized, market-oriented context, the onus of educational responsibility to learners, who increasingly must pay for services of poor quality, along with civil-society organizations and the market itself. It thus allows for states to abdicate their responsibility for providing citizens with good and relevant educational opportunities. Especially in situations of widespread poverty, however, the withdrawal of state support seems premature. Furthermore, the emphasis on adult learning itself is in danger of losing sight of the needs of the almost one billion adults with little or no literacy skills and competencies.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002 has already made it clear that the adult literacy goal will not be reached in as many as seventy-nine countries. Currently, an estimated 862 million adults are deemed to be illiterate. This number exceeds the total number of children in primary schools throughout the entire world. In this regard, the renewed vision of literacy outlined in the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) and its International Plan of Action is clearly of central importance. Both adults and young people have to acquire new forms of literacy and be given opportunities to develop their ability to select, evaluate and utilize information in relevant fashion. Yet the United Nations Literacy Decade bears both risks and opportunities. Serious hazards lie in the damaging repercussions for our world should we fail to make a real difference for those people who still live without the tangible benefits of literacy or whose lives remain burdened by low levels of literacy. Meanwhile, encouraging prospects in meeting adult literacy objectives reside in the provision of fresh resources and capacities, reflected in individual existences endowed with hitherto unavailable possibilities, for economic, political and social growth.

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals have become effective measures for adult learning and related development issues. They could usher in the real manifestation of the collective will of nations and other social and economic forces for actively addressing extreme poverty. These goals can be achieved, however, only through strategically incorporating adult learning. Moreover, since CONFINTEA V, the significance of adult education for addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic has been recognized. It is clear that AIDS is not a health issue alone, but is instead implicated in matters of poverty, development and gender.

The increasing commoditization of knowledge and limitation of ownership are disturbing, as is the mounting loss of independence in research. Inasmuch as facilitating people's critical analysis of their situation can promote their working to enrich their own livelihood, empowerment through education and learning represents a key to sustainable and equitable development. It is essential to assert the need for universal access to knowledge along with the autonomy of research. The importance of respecting and preserving indigenous forms of knowledge is likewise a pressing concern.

As its contribution to the CONFINTEA V Midterm Review, the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) conducted studies in sixteen countries, employing a set of eleven indicators reflecting a civil-society perspective. The study concludes that although a new vision of adult learning is, indeed, emerging, the respective discourse and action are incongruent. Significant progress has been made in work-related learning, as innovations are observable in all regions, but literacy and Education For All tend to remain separate. Too little attention has been awarded to the significance of adult learning for citizenship, health and environmental concerns. Explorations of experiences gained in empowering the most vulnerable members of society continue to be exceptions. There are almost everywhere genuine indications of a benevolent political will, but what is needed now is concrete action and accountability.

A Call for Action and Accountability

We, the participants in the Midterm Review of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), have come to the conclusion that despite the commitments made in 1997 in The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future, adult education and learning has not received the attention which it deserves in major education reforms and in recent international drives to eliminate poverty, achieve gender justice, provide education for all and foster sustainable development. Our Midterm Review of the worldwide situation of adult education and learning – conducted thematically, globally, regionally, nationally and locally by governments, non-governmental and civil-society organizations, engaged networks, social movements and other partners – has, in fact, revealed a disturbing regression in the field.

For we have seen a decline in public funding for adult education and learning, even as the minimal adult literacy goal set in the Dakar Framework for Action is achievable – requiring just US-$ 2.8 billion per year. Furthermore, support by various international agencies and national governments alike has concentrated on formal basic education for children to the detriment and neglect of adult education and learning.

The ability of adult education and learning to contribute to a world in which people live together in peace and democracy and its potential to contribute to building learning societies in support of the struggle against poverty and overcoming global strife, violence, HIV/AIDS, environmental destruction, demographic tensions and a myriad of other ills have not been adequately realized. We are particularly concerned that its potential to enable people to live in a world with HIV/AIDS is not being exploited, as millions of vulnerable young persons and adults are exposed to the consequences of the pandemic.

We are alarmed that the confident perspective documented by CONFINTEA V has given way to a situation which, due to global tensions, conflict and war as well as the weakening of the United Nations, is dominated by fear and insecurity.

Nonetheless, there is yet a chance for creative action. Despite the daunting realities now confronting us, we are witnessing the birth of a new global consciousness which itself, insisting on equality and diversity and calling for universal respect of ethics, rights and laws, spawns the hope that another world and another kind of education and learning are still possible.

For our Review has also highlighted numerous innovative policy and legislative changes, an increased tide of participation in adult education and learning, significant advances in the empowerment of women and the expression of new learning demands by groups with special needs attended by pioneering inclusive educational responses serving these groups. The joy of

learning is celebrated in Learning Festivals and Adult Learners Week in more than 50 countries worldwide.

In view of these developments, we, the participants in the CONFINTEA V Midterm Review, reaffirm our commitment to The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future. We wish to remind the world that adult education and learning is a fundamental human right and therefore must remain a collective responsibility shared by all learners, adult educators, governments, non-governmental and civil-society organizations, the private sector, international bodies and the entire family of the United Nations. All of these actors and partners must work with UNESCO and UN agencies to propel, monitor collectively and account for the endorsement and implementation of lifelong learning made at CONFINTEA V.

We believe that the political will to achieve the goals of The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future must now be backed with resource allocation, outfitted with a concrete course of action and equipped with new partnerships.

Today, more than ever, adult education and learning composes an indispensable key for unlocking the creative forces of people, social movements and nations. Peace, justice, self-reliance, economic development, social cohesion and solidarity remain indispensable goals and obligations to be further pursued and reinforced in and through adult education and learning.

We therefore call upon Member States, bi- and multilateral agencies, non-governmental and civil-society organizations, social movements and the private sector

- to include adult education and learning in all development initiatives and social programs as an essential contribution to economic prosperity, sustainable development, social cohesion and solidarity;

- to promote community-driven development approaches as an important starting point for adult education and learning as well as poverty reduction;

- to adopt inclusive policies and take concrete measures and provide adequate resources in support of education programs mainstreaming and catering to the learning demands of persons with disabilities as well as marginalized groups such as indigenous people, migrants and refugees, minorities (including sexual minorities, where licit), prisoners etc.;

- to recognize adult learning as an investment and not solely an item of social consumption, let alone merely a marketable product;

- to increase funding for adult learning, as a consequence, to an equitable share of the six percent of the Member States' gross national product to be invested in education set as a benchmark by The Agenda for the Future;

- to accept that commitment to lifelong learning for economic prosperity and social cohesion is a necessary response to globalization as well as an essential component of local community development and individual self-fulfillment;

- to integrate adult education and learning more systematically into the education plans and agendas of governments at the local, national, regional and global levels as well as into the programs, conferences and summits of UN agencies – especially those related to the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003–2012), the Dakar Framework for Action (EFA), the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI) co-ordinated by the World Bank – and so take advantage of its synergetic potential;

- to articulate organically CONFINTEA V recommendations for adult literacy and adult basic education with the United Nations Literacy Decade International Plan of Action and the Dakar Framework for Action and implement them in the perspective of lifelong learning.

We call in particular upon the industrialized nations to align their aid agencies and education ministries with the bi- and multilateral agencies they support in order to harmonize domestic and international policies for lifelong learning.

We call upon UNESCO

- to integrate the CONFINTEA V follow-up with the monitoring of EFA goals and invite accordingly all partners to provide and produce collective input for the EFA Global Monitoring Report and its underlying processes, especially the 2005 Report to be devoted to literacy;

- to support the national capacity of Member States as well as non-governmental and civil-society organizations and partner agencies in training adult educators, in establishing indicators for continuous monitoring of the United Nations Literacy Decade by 2004 and in systematically assessing literacy levels in different countries and contexts;

- to reinforce the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE) in monitoring the implementation of CONFINTEA V commitments with all partners along the lines expressed in this Call for Action and Accountability.

Finally, we call upon Member States, UN agencies and non-governmental and civil-society organizations as well as social and private partners to organize the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) in 2009 as a case of accountability in adult education and learning, one based on collective monitoring and evaluation.

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